

ART REVIEW

Ramshackle alleys find home in SoHo gallery

SWOON. Through Aug. 13 at 76 Grand St., Manhattan. Call 212-343-7300 or visit www.deitch.com. You can also see Swoon's work at PS1's "Greater New York" exhibition.

BY SHIRINE SAAD

Swoon, a Brooklyn street artist whose delicate prints and paper works depict the poetry of urban life, would rather paste her stuff in the tiny alleys of Williamsburg and SoHo than on sterile gallery walls.

Swoon, 27, haunts the city with intricately crafted paper characters inspired by German wood-block prints, William Kentridge's paper silhouettes and Indonesian shadow puppets. She says she loves to watch them rot, peel and fade as time goes by.

But now, Swoon has become a star on the gallery scene. She has been picked up by Deitch Projects, the hype-mecca that has hosted such big shots as Yoko Ono and Vanessa Beecroft. After all, pasting portraits on the streets doesn't pay the rent.

The question is: What remains when a street artist creates an in-

stallation for a hot SoHo gallery? Swoon has managed to inhabit and subvert the gallery with a labyrinthine installation that transports the viewer to a fantasy urban universe.

Drawing on the industrial chaos of Kowloon Walled City in Hong Kong, one of the world's most densely populated slums, she buried the gallery's white walls under an avalanche of subway tunnels, scaffolds, bridges and houses made of paper and wood, and shady corners where mysterious characters wander.

In the entrance hall, the viewer peeks through square windows in black walls at printed scenes of subway cars on wood panels. Using rough wood-block etchings, sharp pencil lines and white-sprayed highlights, Swoon has rendered the expression on every passenger's face with breathtaking precision. The naive simplicity of her figures radiates humanity and compassion.

Suspended drawings of life-size paper kids feeding pigeons dwell in the corner of the first room, whose floor has been scattered with old pieces of debris and bright, beautifully carved wood. Daylight flows in from a huge window, giving life to the

pastel blue and yellow backgrounds. Frail paper pigeons hang on strings all over the room.

On the other wall, the artist has painted an intricate landscape of steel roller coasters.

The labyrinth leads into a bigger space, where colored wood panels hang from high ceilings; old pieces of steel and dirty cardboard cover the walls. Paper clothes dry on a laundry line, alongside butterflies and fish.

An unsteady black bridge overlooks the panorama. Jazz songs, horns and car motors burble.

Painted on one hidden wall, a woman's hair is transformed into a sea of flowers, butterflies, swords and raised fists. On the bottom of her dress, the artist has sketched a banal scene of everyday life: a laundry string, a vaulted passage and a woman cleaning the floor with a mop, a scarf tied on her head.

Artists like Swoon may condemn the barrenness of galleries, but she has successfully infiltrated the "white cube" with her own lyrical version of the streets, opening a dialogue with her stained cutouts in nearby SoHo alleys.

Shirine Saad is a freelance writer.



Swoon's art installation at Deitch Projects buries the gallery in a chaotic urban landscape.